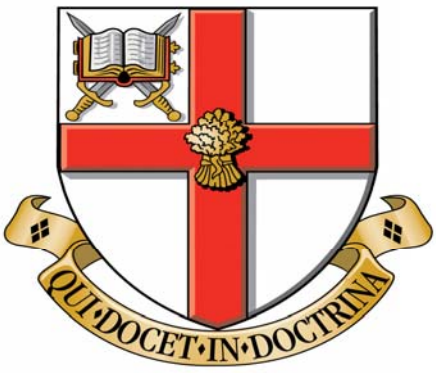

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‘There is a great deal to the build and wearing of hats, a great deal more than at first meets the eye.’ The Significance of Headwear in the novels of Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell

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Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the significance of headwear to Victorian culture and society, primarily through an analysis of the ways in which headwear is presented in selected works by Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell. The dissertation will also examine articles, illustrations and periodicals from the time in order to gain an insight into the way headwear was viewed in the nineteenth century, in conjunction with information gathered from Brontë and Gaskell's works. Further research into the subject area has suggested that this is an area of research which has been unusually overlooked, as there are many works which discuss the importance of nineteenth century clothing, but very few with any in-depth analysis of the importance of headwear. The investigation is split into two chapters. The first chapter analyses headwear and its significance to the representation of the individual, as well as the way in which the adornments and trimmings associated with headwear can reveal aspects of a character's personality. There is also an analysis of the significance of headwear and its relation to the representation of masculinity and femininity, with reference to cross-dressing and Judith Butler's ideas of gender construction. The second chapter examines headwear as a class signifier, primarily focusing on the headwear of the middle and working classes, including maids and servants. The socially ambiguous nature of the governess's position is investigated, as well as highlighting the usage of headwear as a means of advancing one's social class.

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Introduction

In the nineteenth century, hats, caps and bonnets were considered an extremely important aspect of everyday fashion, with factories all over the country specialising in the manufacture of hats. Stockport was particularly famous for its many hat factories, and even today has its own museum dedicated to the study of hats and hat manufacturing equipment. There have been books and articles published on the history of hat manufacturing in this time period, such as Penny McKnight's *Stockport Hatting*, which focuses on the manufacturing process itself, on a local level rather than discussing the wider influence of headwear outside Stockport itself, and especially not analysing the significance of headwear in literature. Unusually, there are very few critical works which assess headwear from a literary or journalistic perspective, choosing instead to examine the role of clothing as a whole by analysing other items of clothing such as corsets and general dress.

Ariel Beaujot, in her book *Victorian Fashion Accessories*, investigates accessories such as the parasol, glove, and fan, but surprisingly does not focus on headwear, which is unusual considering the in-depth analysis that she gives to the parasol, another accessory used to cover the head. She also neglects to examine the accessories through their representation in novels of the time in any great detail, which appears to be a vital link in understanding their importance. However, as the hat can be classed as both an item of clothing and as an accessory, her work can be applied to the research undertaken in this dissertation in order to more clearly define the significance of headwear in the nineteenth century. Another critic who concerns themselves with the analysis of clothing and accessories is Simon Gatrell, whose book *Thomas Hardy: Writing Dress* investigates the significance of nearly every possible item of clothing in Hardy's works, but does not devote any space for an analysis of headwear, despite including several quotations from Hardy's works which specifically mention hats and bonnets. There are small sections which briefly touch on the importance of headwear, but in a

work which devotes entire chapters to hair and gloves there appears to be an intentional avoidance of the subject.

While contemporary analysis of the impact of headwear can be difficult to come across, numerous articles and texts from the nineteenth century period discuss the importance of one's headwear and the impact it can have on the perception of one's place in society. William Makepeace Thackeray, in his role as social commentator and observer, writes that '[t]here is a great deal in the build and wearing of hats, a great deal more than at first meets the eye.'[1] The insinuation that there is a 'great deal' to hats corresponds with the observations of other sources regarding the importance of hats in Victorian society (which are mentioned further down), and the fact that hats are mentioned continually by Thackeray in both his social commentaries and his novels further highlight the fact that hats were seen as an integral part of society. His assertion that hats are 'more than at first meets the eye' would appear to justify an analysis of headwear, and arguably embodies the driving force behind this dissertation; namely, that the significance of headwear to Victorian society, both from a literary and cultural perspective, appears to be overlooked by contemporary critics and warrants a thorough investigation.

There is also a significant amount of evidence available through other periodicals and articles to justify an analysis of the significance of headwear. One such article, titled 'Hats Off!' satirically addresses the rising influence of hats upon society in the mid nineteenth century, protesting 'against the '"monstrous regiment" of Hatters. Their power has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished. Britons, countrymen, and brothers, let us no longer bow the head to them, for too long have we perspired under their tyranny.'[2] While comical in tone, the underlying issues of the article are clear to see; namely, that hats were viewed as a

1William Makepeace Thackeray, *Volume 5 of Miscellanies* (Boston: Fields, Osgood & Company, 1870), p.207
2 Anon, 'Hats Off!', *Chamber's Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*, 1859

powerful cultural and social force. The use of the words 'monstrous regiment' gives a sinister and militaristic edge to the article, which in turn implies that the rules governing the wearing of hats are extremely strict, and the consequences for not adhering to these rules were catastrophic from a social perspective. The author of the article goes on to state that the rules governing the wearing of hats are a recent phenomenon, stating that 'The truth, however, is, that all this reverence for the hat is, like so many other things in our social life, a thing of mere form, and convention, and opinion.'[3] The suggestion that the wearing of hats is a 'thing of mere form, and convention, and opinion' implies that the obsession with hats is not a cultural affectation which is likely to endure for an extended period of time. However, from further research it would appear that Victorian society and its obsession with headwear was all-consuming and dictated every aspect of one's daily life.

Hats appear to take priority before all other social considerations, and even the poorest sections of society were aware of the importance of headwear. Francis Wey, during a visit to London in the 1850s, provides a description of the English poor and their relationship with headwear;

> [M]ere skeletons, covered with rags of such incredible dirt that it makes one retch to approach them. […] But the most incredible thing is that these scarcely human, half-naked creatures attach the greatest importance to the wearing of a hat, or some portion of one, if only a brim. The women also, however scanty their clothing, always wear some battered, bedraggled, shapeless headdress.[4]

Wey's use of the words 'scarcely human' is particularly revealing, in the sense that even the poorest sections of society 'attach the greatest importance to the wearing of a hat', which suggests that regardless of a person's position in society, a hat was considered to be vital in one's everyday life. The fact that the women are described as wearing very little clothing, yet

3 Ibid
4 Francis Wey, *A Frenchman Sees the English in the Fifties*, trans. Valerie Pirie (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1935), p.106

appear to be only concerned with the state of their headwear is particularly significant, as it further gives the impression that referring to the Victorian preoccupation with headwear as an obsession is not as exaggerated as one might be led to believe by the comical nature of articles such as 'Hats Off!'

A great many novelists of the nineteenth century appear to be concerned with headwear, and yet it appears to be an aspect that has been overlooked by critics. Various authors often make reference to their characters' headwear, giving detailed descriptions which give a greater insight into their characters expectations, desires, social class and personality. Initially, it was very difficult to decide which authors to focus on, due to the sheer number of authors who would have been directly relevant to this topic. This dissertation could have analysed authors such as Émile Zola, who appears to be primarily concerned with hatless women in his works, or American writers such as Edith Wharton, which would have made for an interesting comparison between hats at home and abroad. Another possible avenue of investigation could have been the works of Thomas Hardy, simply due to the sheer amount of description he gives to clothing in his novels, with a large number of specific references to headwear in *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Nevertheless, the decision was eventually made to focus solely on the works of Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell, owing to the fact that both write in a similar time period (1845-65), both make references to the importance of headwear in their novels, and the two authors knew each other quite well, which makes for an interesting angle with which to make comparisons between their respective works. Interestingly, neither of Charlotte Brontë's sisters appeared to express an interest in writing about headwear, despite being in close contact with a sister who seems to take a great interest in the subject, and the fact that all three sisters worked as governesses, something which appears to have greatly influenced Charlotte's writings. There is nothing in any articles or letters to suggest why this is, however it could simply be a consequence of the sisters' varied

writing styles rather than any personal experience. Gaskell particularly stands out because of *Cranford*, which places a great deal of importance on the presentation of one's headwear, and what it means to the wearer. One such quotation suggests that '[t]he expenditure on dress in Cranford was principally in that one article to. If the heads were buried in smart new caps, the ladies were like ostriches, and cared not what became of their bodies.'[5] This quotation adds further weight to Francis Wey's previous observation, and suggests that not only were the poor focused solely on their headwear, this focus extended to respectable middle-class country ladies, and implies that Wey's statement is not as hyperbolic as one would previously have been led to believe by its comical tone. The ostrich-like nature of the ladies reflects the single-minded obsession with hats and headwear which continually becomes apparent through literature and articles in the nineteenth century.

The purpose of this dissertation, then, is to analyse the significance of headwear in the literary works of both Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell, to identify similarities and differences (if there are any) between the two authors in the way they present and utilise headwear, and investigate their respective backgrounds and whether or not their usage of headwear serves as an indicator of their social background. The body of the investigation will be split into two chapters, one focusing primarily on headwear and its effect on the individual as a reflection of personality, character and gender, while the other chapter will focus on hats as an indicator of class, primarily focusing on the hats of the working class as well as those of servants and governesses. Originally the dissertation was planned to be split into three chapters, with a third chapter focusing on headwear and its relevance to gender issues, but as the dissertation took shape it became clear that gender issues could be effectively placed into the other chapters as a part of the analysis. Brontë places more emphasis on her male

5 Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1998), p.93. All further references will be given in the body of the text

characters and their relationship with headwear, but even with the two authors combined there are not enough unique instances of male interaction with hats compared to their female counterparts to justify a separate chapter.

Overall, this dissertation aims to explore the apparently overlooked importance of headwear to nineteenth century society through an investigation of the works of two of its most prominent female authors, in an attempt to properly understand the significance of headwear and the significance it has to the field of literary theory, and to determine whether or not it is a topic which is deserving of further study.

Chapter One

'Cynthia seemed to forget her tears and her troubles, and to throw her soul into millinery.' [6]
The significance of headwear to the representation of the individual

In the nineteenth century it was believed that a woman's personality could be determined by the hat, bonnet or cap that she wore, as well as by the adornments and decorations on said garments. Both Brontë and Gaskell utilise headwear in order to make comments on the character's personality, but they do so in radically different ways. According to Anne Hollander, 'it is reasonable to suggest in principle that when an author chooses to describe clothes, they most often bear some meaningful relationship to the personality of the character conceived.'[7] In *Wives and Daughter*, Gaskell gives a detailed account of Molly Gibson's bonnet and its adornments:

> On the drawers opposite to the little white dimity bed in which Molly Gibson lay, was a primitive kind of bonnet-stand on which was hung a bonnet, carefully covered over from any chance of dust, with a large cotton handkerchief, of so heavy and serviceable a texture that if the thing underneath it had been a flimsy fabric of gauze and lace and flowers, it would have been altogether 'scomfished' (again to quote Betty's vocabulary). But the bonnet was made of solid straw, and its only trimming was a plan white ribbon put over the crown, and forming the strings. (*Wives and Daughters*, p.3)

This bonnet is clearly very important to Molly, and is clearly well looked after – as evidenced by the words 'carefully covered over from any chance of dust'. What makes this quotation especially significant, however, is the description of the bonnet itself. The word used to describe the bonnet's material, 'solid', gives the impression that this is a reflection of Molly's own moral character, which, as it later transpires in the novel, is revealed to be an accurate assessment, meaning that headwear serves as a tool for foreshadowing. The fact that her trimmings appear to be very simple, as evidenced by the use of the words 'plain white

6 Elizabeth Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2003), p.404. All further references will be given in the body of the text
7Anne Hollander quoted in Simon Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy: Writing Dress* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), p. 13.

ribbon', could be a reflection of her young age, but also of her purity, owing to the fact that the ribbon is white. The quotation 'a flimsy fabric of gauze and lace and flowers' further suggests that children of Molly's age would have worn headwear similar to this, but the fact that Molly doesn't suggests that Gaskell is praising the dependable and sensible aspects of Molly's character. Further research would also suggest that Gaskell is not alone in her belief that headwear serves as a reflection of one's moral character. In a publication from 1849 titled 'The Honour of Honesty', a serving girl is rewarded for displaying good morals and character. At the beginning of the story, the serving girl is in need of a new bonnet to replace her own, 'the coarse straw bonnet – which had never been handsome – was now sunburnt and dirty, and with its soiled and faded ribbon, looked hardly neat, though it had been carefully kept.'[8] While the bonnet is described as being 'dirty' and 'soiled', which would appear to suggest it belongs to someone who works for a living. It is also crucially described as having 'been carefully kept'. This indicates that the bonnet means as much to the serving girl as Molly Gibson's bonnet does to her, which further suggests that even when a character is of a lower social standing, the amount of care they give their headwear is a key indicator of their character and morals. The simple trimmings on the serving girl's bonnet, in a similar fashion to Molly Gibson, further highlight the unpretentious personality of both characters. However, referring back to the 'flimsy fabric' and the 'lace and flowers', the word 'flimsy' is the polar opposite of the solidity of Molly's bonnet. The 'lace and flowers' highlight another important aspect of the analysis of headwear and their relation to the morality and personality of characters; namely, the adornments and accessories of the bonnets. Both Gaskell and Brontë are concerned with implications of flowers as adornments, but appear to depict their importance in different ways.

8 Anon, 'The Honour of Honesty', *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal*, 1849

In Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* the servant, 'Dixon had complained that […] Susan Lightfoot had been seen with artificial flowers in her bonnet, thereby giving evidence of a vain and giddy character.'[9] Here, the girl's last name, 'Lightfoot', is also reaffirming Dixon's assumptions as it could infer a flighty and carefree character. This, combined with what the reader is told about the adornments on her bonnet would appear to suggest that Dixon's complaints are correct. The fact that the flowers are 'artificial', and the reader is expressly informed of this fact, suggests an artificiality to Susan's own character. It is interesting to note that a synonym for 'giddy' is 'unstable' and 'unsteady' which further suggests an unreliability in Susan's character. If she is willing to use fake flowers in order to create a desired impression, it leads the reader and other characters to speculate as what other aspects of her character are artificial and fabricated for her own benefit. According to Anne Hollander:

> What we choose to wear is to some degree an expression of our personality – it depends on how much desire we have to express ourselves through our clothes and how much freedom we have to do it. But even if what we wear is consequence of a conscious intention to create a specific image of ourselves, and the look is put together with care and skill, we cannot guarantee that observers will assess our dress as we intend or hope; in fact we can guarantee that some will not.[10]

Here, Hollander is stating that whilst a person may dress or clothe themselves as they wish (within reason), and hope that the viewer may perceive what the wearer wants them to perceive – it does not necessarily always happen. The words 'an expression of our personality' reaffirm Dixon's statement that it signifies her character. By adorning her bonnet with artificial flowers it can be inferred that Susan is attempting to 'create a specific image of' herself, i.e. carefree and attractive, when in matter of fact Dixon has assessed her 'dress' not as she would 'intend or hope' but instead perceives her as being vain and untrustworthy. This

9 Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2002), p.30. All further references will be given in the body of the text
10 Anne Hollander quoted in Simon Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy: Writing Dress*, p.14

is unintentional on Susan's part and perhaps comes about as a result of naivety and a lack of understanding of the significance of adornment and what it may signify. Gaskell herself appears to be very interested in trimmings and adornments as highlighted in several of her letters, particularly those to her daughters. In one of her letters, Gaskell mentions that she is 'going to try to trim a bonnet for [her]self'.[11] This indicates that she has enough knowledge of bonnets and their trimmings in order to attempt to do it herself rather than have someone else trim her bonnet for her, which in turn suggests that Gaskell's knowledge of adornment means that the decoration of headwear should be considered an extremely significant aspect of her novels. Furthermore, the continual reference to adornments in her novels suggests that Gaskell also intends this to be a revealing aspect of her works. Cynthia, in *Wives and Daughters*, is very important when understanding the way Gaskell utilises bonnets and their adornments. Cynthia is a character who is very difficult to understand - in one moment she is friendly and inviting, and the next cold and indifferent, and often seems emotionally distant from the rest of the characters in the novel. However, Gaskell states that 'Cynthia seemed to forget her tears and her troubles, and to throw her soul into millinery' (*Wives and Daughters,* p.404), which infers that whilst Cynthia may seem emotionally distant she is in matter of fact imbuing her headwear with her emotions and personality rather than let it be shown through her actions or body language. Similarly to Susan Lightfoot, Cynthia enjoys the appearance of artificial flowers in her bonnets. She is described as having 'brought down her pretty artificial flowers, plucked out her own best bonnet to put into Molly's, saying they would suit her complexion, and that a knot of ribbons would do well enough for her.' (*Wives and Daughters,* p.198) The fact that Cynthia also favours 'artificial flowers' is interesting; if we apply Dixon's statement to Cynthia's bonnet, it infers that Cynthia could also be seen as having a 'vain and giddy character'. Although Cynthia is not portrayed as being vain at the time the

11 J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard (eds.), *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell* (Manchester: Mandolin, 1997), p.198

novel is set, it is further stated that in the past this description of her character would have been accurate. Her vanity caused her to accept a gift of money from a gentleman seeking to marry her, with which she goes on to buy 'boots and gloves, and a bonnet and a mantle, and a white muslin gown […] and a silk gown that followed to the Donaldsons''. (*Wives and Daughters*, p.420) Cynthia's vanity, clearly evidenced in this quotation, leads her to overlook the fact that she is in indebted to Mr Preston and she is physically adorned in clothes bought by him, which is an attempt on Mr Preston's part to gain some measure of ownership over Cynthia. This further highlights the power of clothing to control and manipulate the perceptions and representations of others.

In a similar fashion to Susan Lightfoot, Cynthia's fake flowers suggest to the reader that there may be other aspects of her character that could be falsified or concealed, which is an assumption which later proves to be correct. It is clear to see that the decoration of headwear can be used in order to determine deeper truths about the personalities of Gaskell's characters that the characters may seek to hide. Furthermore, this is reinforced by Ferdynand Zweig's statement that '[c]lothes reflect our personality'.[12] If this is the case, Cynthia's artificial flowers reflect her hidden personality, revealing an aspect of her character in a way that she has no control over. However, Zweig's words, when applied to the fact that Cynthia is 'plucking' out some of these flowers from her bonnet in attempt to improve Molly's bonnet, are significant, especially considering the above argument that the flowers reflect Cynthia's personality. Cynthia, in a similar fashion to Susan Lightfoot, believes that placing flowers on a bonnet will 'suit [Molly's] complexion' and thereby improve it, and is therefore unaware of the metaphorical implications of the adornments. If clothes do in fact 'reflect our personality', then by giving Molly the artificial flowers, Cynthia is inadvertently manipulating Molly's

12 Ferdynand Zweig, 'Clothing Standards and Habits' in Mary Ellen Roach and Joanne Bubolz Eicher (eds.), *Dress, Adornment, and the Social Order* (London: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1965), pp.111-116 (p.111)

personality. Interestingly, the characters in the novel who know Molly and Cynthia go on to further state that 'Molly and Cynthia have got their new plaid shawls just alike, and they trim their bonnets alike'(*Wives and Daughters*, p.397). The fact that 'they trim their bonnets alike' once Cynthia has been living with Molly suggests that Cynthia is attempting to rectify her tarnished personality by imitating Molly, someone who is understood by her immediate contemporaries to have a good character. It could additionally be suggested that Cynthia is attempting to mask her previous indiscretions by adopting the dress and mannerisms of another woman in the hopes Molly's purity will become associated with her, which would make her appear more virtuous by association. However, there is also evidence to suggest that rather than Cynthia adopting Molly's style, the roles could be reversed and instead Molly is being convinced to dress in a similar fashion to Cynthia. Cynthia's only issue with Molly is an underlying envy of Molly's pure and untouched nature, and as such the offering of artificial flowers could be seen as an attempt by Cynthia to impose aspects of her personality onto Molly in an attempt to make Molly appear less pure, so as to reassure herself of the state of her own character. Ariel Beaujot states that '[w]hat was on the inside was reflected on the outside; therefore, a woman's looks could be read as an indication of her morality.'[13] Cynthia is fully aware of this, and is using dress and headwear to alter Molly's looks and by extension the way in which her morality is perceived by the community. It is important to point out that Molly does not adopt any of Cynthia's mannerisms or behavioural tics, merely her style of dress. The similarity of their clothes and bonnets work to Molly's disadvantage, as she is mistaken for Cynthia, which Cynthia then uses to her advantage, as she appears more than willing to use Molly as a scapegoat in order to protect her reputation within the community. Referring back to the previous assertion that attempts to alter personalities through clothing do not always work in the way that characters expect them, either one of the two

13 Ariel Beaujot, *Victorian Fashion Accessories* (London: Berg, 2012), p.51

interpretations of Molly and Cynthia dressing similarly could have been Cynthia's true intention, and both scenarios work in Cynthia's favour and are detrimental to Molly. However, while Gaskell clearly utilises the adornments as a means of reflecting personality, it would appear that Brontë pays extensive attention to adornments and decoration, but in a very different way.

In *Villette*, whilst on board a ship, Lucy Snow observes the Watsons and their clothing, with particular focus on their headwear and its adornments. They are described as 'doubtless rich people, [who] were dressed richly, gaily, and absurdly out of character for the circumstances. Their bonnets with bright flowers, their velvet cloaks and silk dresses seemed better suited for park or promenade than for a damp packet-deck.'[14] Lucy does not interact with the Watsons at all in the novel, but their dress tells her, and by extension the reader, a great deal about their character and personality in the space of a single boat journey. From the above quotation, it is immediately implied that the Watsons are wealthy and their clothing is impractical, as is evidenced by the use of the words 'dressed richly' and 'absurdly out of character for the circumstances'. The 'bright flowers' of their bonnets, when viewed in conjunction with the assertion that they would be 'better suited for park or promenade', suggest that the women are dressing more to attract attention to themselves rather than from any concern for practicality. In a similar sense to Gaskell's artificial flowers, which infer vanity, it could be suggested that using flowers of any type as adornments for headwear is viewed as ostentatious and vain, and is used primarily to draw attention to oneself. However, where Brontë differs from Gaskell is that Brontë appears to use the preconceptions created by adornments and present them in such a way as to subvert them and reveal hidden dimensions to her characters which are not revealed until later in her novels. One such example of Brontë subverting preconceptions based on headwear and adornments is shown in Lucy's first

14 Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1999), p.45. All further references will be given in the body of the text

meeting with Ginevra Fanshawe, on the same journey she encounters the Watsons. Ginevra is described as being 'quite a girl, pretty and fair; her simple print dress, untrimmed straw bonnet, and large shawl, gracefully worn, formed a costume plain to Quakerism: yet, for her, becoming enough.' (*Villette,* p.45) It appears that from what Lucy sees of Ginevra she finds her to be agreeable, as it appears that she is dressing sensibly for the situation, which reflects well on her in Lucy's eyes. Her 'untrimmed straw bonnet' and 'simple print dress' suggest a simplicity to Ginevra's character, as well as a practicality which would not appear out of place in Gaskell's works. Her neutral dress and lack of adornment make her more difficult to discern than a more flamboyantly dressed character. This could be an explanation as to why Lucy completely misinterprets Ginevra's character, and in fact spends much of the rest of the novel trying to avoid her, as it transpires her character is anything but simple and plain. Ariel Beaujot states that '[a]dvice writers in the nineteenth century insisted that the things with which women surrounded themselves - clothing, accessories, home décor – were reflections of their inner characters.'[15] However, Lucy's encounter with Ginevra would appear to dispute this, and could be seen as an example of Brontë suggesting that the preconceptions of headwear and clothing in general can be adapted or subverted by the characters themselves, and the reader, much like the characters of the novel, are more than capable of misinterpreting characters based on basic descriptions of their clothing. This, it could be argued, is further seen in *Villette* in the character of M. Paul Emmanuel and his interpretations of Lucy's dress.

Emmanuel is concerned with '[w]hat fatal influence had impelled [Lucy Snow] lately to introduce flowers under the brim of [her] bonnet' (*Villette,* p.311). The words 'fatal influence' imply that the professor believes that this is a matter of extreme importance, and that considering the personality of Lucy Snow, and the previous assertions that certain adornments could make the wearer appear vain. The professor does not want Lucy to present

15 Beaujot, *Victorian Fashion Accessories*, p.75

herself as vain when her character, as evidenced by her actions throughout the novel, is anything but this. As the conversation continues, it is implied that Emmanuel has numerous contentions with Lucy's various alterations to other aspects of her dress, and the two appear to come to an agreement as to what is acceptable. This is further highlighted in the following quotations. Lucy asks Emmanuel ''And the flowers under my bonnet, monsieur? […] They are very little ones -?'', to which Emmanuel replies ''Keep them little, then, [and] [p]ermit them not to become full-blown.'' (*Villette*, p.312) This comic exchange highlights more serious points about the importance Victorians placed on headwear and how it relates to the personality of the wearer. By having an eccentric character such as M. Paul Emmanuel voice his concerns in such a wildly exaggerated manner, it could be suggested that Brontë is voicing her own opinion on Beaujot's previous statement that 'a woman's looks could be read as an indication of her morality', and is using one of her own characters as a narrative mouthpiece. By presenting Emmanuel as a character who in some ways is not meant to be taken seriously by the reader, it could be suggested that Brontë is subtly encouraging her readers to disagree with his views on adornments, and this by extension questions whether a woman's character can truly be determined by her clothing. However, furthermore it is imperative to point out that the criticisms of Lucy's adornments are voiced by a male character, which is an extremely rare occurrence in the works of both authors. It is also unusual for a man to interact with hats and headwear to the extent that Emmanuel does; the way he treats his hat could be perceived as being extremely feminine in comparison with other men in the novels of Brontë and Gaskell, in the respect that his hat appears to take on elements of his personality while other male characters merely interact with theirs.

One such example of this is Mr Preston in *Wives and Daughters*. He is described as 'playing with his hat, almost as if he did not care to have any answer to his question. Yet he was listening acutely, and with a half smile on his face.' (*Wives and Daughters*, p.202) While

Mr Preston's hat is not described, in a similar fashion to other 'male' hats in the works of both authors, what makes this quotation so interesting is the way in which he interacts with it. By 'playing with his hat', it is implied that Mr Preston is attempting to give the impression that he has no interest in the conversation, and as such appears to be utilising his hat as a means of displaying an emotion he does not necessarily feel. The fact that he is 'listening acutely' highlights that his performance with the hat is merely a show to feign disinterest. Ariel Beaujot writes that 'While men's characters were now understood to be interpreted through their actions, women were purported to display their inner selves through their garments.'[16] This perfectly illustrates the idea that men have just as complicated a relationship with their headwear, just in a different fashion to women. A man's interaction with his hat gives a greater impression of their character than the hat itself, which Mr Preston appears to understand and attempts to use to his advantage. A further example of a man's significant interactions with a specific item of headwear comes in the form of Mr Coxe, another character from Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*. He is described as being 'red up to the very roots of his red hair, and kept turning his glossy new hat round and round in his fingers.' (*Wives and Daughters*, p.360) The fact that the hat is first and foremost described as 'glossy' and 'new' is in itself significant, as this is one of the rare occasions in the works of Gaskell and Brontë where a man's hat is given a description. This is clearly a relevant description on Gaskell's part, as the hat's newness highlights Mr Coxe's new found wealth. However, unlike Mr Preston's manipulation of the hat, it appears that Mr Coxe is lacking the knowledge and understanding to successfully manipulate the hat to present himself in a specific fashion. By continually turning his hat round in his hands, he is unwittingly indicating a sense of apprehension about the situation he finds himself in. However, later in the passage his nervousness appears to dissipate, as 'he looked modestly down, and smoothed the nap of his

16 Beaujot, *Victorian Fashion Accessories*, p.124

hat, smiling a little while he did so.' (*Wives and Daughters*, p.361)This appears to occur when he believes he 'may venture to hope that Miss Kirkpatrick is not quite indifferent to' him. (*Wives and Daughters*, p.361) His hope that Cynthia is interested in him, and the confidence this brings, is reflected in his treatment of his hat. The fact that he looks 'modestly down, and smoothed the nap' of his new hat could indicate that he believes that the wealth showing through his headwear is in part the reason for his success, and his smile is a further suggestion that he views his hat with a great respect.

Perhaps the most significant example of a man's relationship with his hat comes in the form of M. Paul Emmanuel, who is not only 'understood to be interpreted through [his] actions' but also demonstrates instances of displaying his inner self through his garment, namely his bonnet-grec. Lucy sees the professor 'wearing, not his savage-looking paletot and severe bonnet-grec, but a young-looking belted blouse and cheerful straw hat.' (*Villette*, p.353) A bonnet-grec is a type of smoking cap, and the fact that it is described as being 'severe', something Emmanuel can occasionally appear to be himself, suggests that this piece of headwear is extension of himself. However, he could be choosing this severe-looking cap as a means of portraying a different aspect of himself. By presenting himself as severe and strict, it could be suggested that he is attempting to create a more professional and intimidating image in order to ensure that he is respected in the schoolroom, his place of business. The 'cheerful straw hat', however, appears to give yet another dimension to his character. Emmanuel is fully aware of the connotations of his severe bonnet-grec, realises it is not necessary or appropriate for a school outing, and as such dispenses with it in favour of a more approachable, cheerful choice of headwear. The bonnet-grec in itself appears to be described as having a personality all of its own, and possessing human qualities. Lucy states that '[w]ith great respect, [she] laid the bonnet on the desk, where its tassel seemed to give [her] an awful nod.' (*Villette*, p.306) The 'respect' that Lucy shows the bonnet-grec gives an

indication as to why it appears to nod back at her; the fact that Emmanuel does not have to physically wear the cap for it to be treated with the same respect he commands is extremely revealing. The respect that others have for the bonnet-grec can be further seen in the passages of the novel which involve Emmanuel and Sylvie the dog. In one such example, Sylvie is described as 'crouching beside it [the bonnet-grec] with the air of miniature lion guarding a kingdom's flag' whenever Emmanuel drops it during play (*Villette*, p.384). The description of the bonnet-grec as being as important as 'a kingdom's flag' is insightful, especially when one considers the connotations which are associated with the flag of a country, such as pride, duty and the power of the country itself. These qualities appear to embody Emmanuel's true nature, as can be seen in his charitable actions toward his former lover's family, providing a home for them and ensuring they have money and clothing. Furthermore, the fact that this appears to be the only example in the novels of Brontë or Gaskell in which a hat takes on human qualities is relevant, as it would appear to suggest that the wearers have such a powerful presence and personality that it is reflected in their headwear, as opposed to headwear conferring its qualities upon the wearer, as has been seen previously. As a result, Emmanuel's hat gains a presence of its own, even when he is not wearing it. The bonnet-grec is infused with the qualities of Emmanuel to such an extent that Lucy could conceivably use it to present herself as male, as is evidenced by the quotation, ''Ah!' he muttered, 'if it came to that – if Miss Lucy meddled with his bonnet-grec – she might just put it on herself, turn garçon for the occasion, and benevolently go to the Athénée in his stead.'' (*Villette*, p.306) This passage further highlights Emmanuel's dramatic nature, as he brings his love of acting and the temporary nature of the stage into the conversation. We learn that nobody dares to touch Emmanuel's bonnet-grec, as when Lucy stretches her hand to it, Emmanuel is described as following 'this daring movement with his eye, no doubt in mixed pity and amazement at its presumption.' (*Villette*, p.306) However, there is a sense that Emmanuel's reluctance to go to

the Athénée is such that he is willing to part with one of his most prized possessions and allow Lucy to use the bonnet-grec to adopt his personality and imitate him, an act he considers to be extremely benevolent if she were to do it. This further reinforces how much of a representation of Emmanuel the bonnet-grec is, and how much of himself is contained within it.

It is crucial to point out that Lucy has already cross-dressed previously to this point in the novel, as she is coerced by Emmanuel into appearing in one of his performances as a man and to dress accordingly, as shown by the quotation to which interestingly Lucy's response is, 'To be dressed like a man did not please, and would not suit me. […] I would keep my own dress; come what might' (*Villette*, p.126), and she only agrees to wear certain garments such as a 'hat', 'cravat', 'a collar' and 'a little vest' (*Villette*, p.127). One gets the impression that these items of clothing, to Lucy at least, are not exclusively masculine and as such do not carry exclusively masculine connotations. It also shows that Lucy has a natural aversion to cross-dressing, most likely as a result of her Victorian sensibilities. This aversion to cross-dressing, and Lucy's assertion that she does not suit male clothing, makes the exchange with Emmanuel over the bonnet-grec all the more insightful into the power of the bonnet, and of Emmanuel himself. Emmanuel's masculinity, evidenced by his interactions with the bonnet-grec, gives a further insight into why he believes Lucy would be able to successfully cross-dress as a 'garçon', while simultaneously giving a reason as to why her stage clothes are unsuccessful in doing so. His bonnet-grec would allow Lucy to 'turn garçon for the occasion' whereas the 'hat' that she uses on stage does not appear to have the same power. However, it is necessary to point out that cross-dressing is common in *Villette*, and perhaps the most significant example is the nun, who it later transpires is actually a man cross-dressing in order to see Ginevra Fanshawe and for whom the most important factor of their disguise is their headwear. The nun's head is described as being 'bandaged, veiled, white' (*Villette*, p.229)

which highlights the fact that the face is completely obscured which by extension means that their identity is also obscured. Fred Bare states, 'Hats are wonderful dressing up clothes and, of course, they can disguise or flatter the wearer'.'[17] In the case of the nun, the headwear is used to disguise rather than flatter, to great effect. This is evidenced by the quotation, in which Ginevra writes to Lucy that ''But for the nun's black gown and white veil, he would have been caught again and again by you and that tiger – Jesuit, M. Paul.' (*Villette*, p.443) The fact that the veil is 'white' appears to be particularly ironic considering the connotations of the colour itself and the activities that the veil is used for, which could be further evidence that Brontë uses the preconceptions generated by certain headwear in order to subvert them with her characters. In this example of cross-dressing, headwear is used to deceive and mislead other characters for personal gain and inappropriate meetings, which also appears to be a common usage of headwear in the works of Charlotte Brontë.

Another form of this deceit is highlighted by Mr Rochester in *Jane Eyre* when he dresses as a gipsy woman, and relies heavily on the headwear to disguise himself from his guests in order to deceive them. Jane describes entering the library, where she sees Sibyl 'seated snugly enough in an easy-chair at the chimney-corner. She had on a red cloak and a black bonnet: or rather, a broad-brimmed gipsy hat, tied down with a striped handkerchief under her chin.'[18] Whilst the rest of Sibyl's clothing is barely described, her hat is described in minute detail, inferring that this is an important factor in this gipsy's garb. The words 'broad-rimmed' suggest that it is covering Sibyl's face and obscuring her true identity – and the fact that it is 'tied down' signifies an attempt on Mr Rochester's part to secure his current identity. Judith Butler writes; 'Consider gender, for instance, as *a corporeal style*, an "act," as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where "performative" itself carries the double

17 Fred Bare quoted in Claire Wilcox, *Satelittes of Fashion: Hats. Bags and Shoes* (London: Crafts Council Gallery, 1998), p.7

18 Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (London: Penguin Group, 2012), p.233. All further references will be given in the body of the text

meaning of "dramatic" and "non referential".'[19] When analysing the performance of Mr Rochester in this passage, it is clear that he conforms to Butler's idea of gender performance, in that he intentionally utilises it for dramatic effect, and attempts to present himself not as Mr Rochester dressed as a gipsy, but solely as a gipsy with no reference to his own identity. It is also imperative to point out that the gipsy's bonnet is a vitally important object in the performance of gender, as it conceals Mr Rochester's true identity far more effectively than his other items of clothing. Interestingly, Mr Rochester's cross-dressing, it could be argued, serves as a hint of foreshadowing for his deceitful nature which is fully revealed later in the novel, and even serves as a metaphor for the deceit contained within the house in general. The gipsy's bonnet, as a feminine item of clothing, does more to highlight Mr Rochester's treachery than perhaps its male equivalent would, perhaps due to what Ariel Beaujot previously describes as women displaying 'their inner selves through their garments.' Mr Rochester's actions in dressing as a gipsy also serve to reveal deeper aspects of his character, and in this way he uses headwear to display both feminine and masculine aspects of his personality, in a similar fashion to M. Paul Emmanuel. However, in *Cranford*, Miss Deborah Jenkyns displays both masculine and feminine aspects of her character, although she is not necessarily cross-dressing there is almost an air of masculinity about her dress.

Miss Jenkyns is described as wearing 'a cravat, and a little bonnet like a jockey-cap, and altogether had the appearance of a strong-minded woman; although she would have despised the modern idea of women being equal to men.' (*Cranford*, p.35) The fact that she is wearing a bonnet is in itself feminine, but the fact that it is described as being 'like a jockey-cap' gives it an air of masculinity, highlighting the ambiguous nature of her gender identity. This ambiguity is further demonstrated by the description of her as having 'the appearance of a strong-minded woman', a clearly feminine portrayal, yet in the same sentence we are told

19 Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (eds.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology, Second Edition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp.900-911, (p.902)

that ‘she would have despised the modern idea of women being equal to men’, a sentiment which would have been shared by many masculine characters. This could be evidence of Gaskell revealing aspects of Miss Jenkyns’ personality, in that Miss Jenkyns herself is a strong minded woman but refuses to admit it. Gaskell makes sure to point out that Miss Jenkyns maintains the household while also caring for her sister, Matty, further reinforcing this assertion. According to Judith Butler, ‘[g]ender is in no way a stable identity […] rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*.’[20] This could suggest why Miss Jenkyn’s gender identity is so strong that simply dressing in masculine clothes is not enough to mask it. Her strong actions, repeated over time, constitute her identity to such an extent that, while not completely stable, is difficult to deny. Mary Smith makes a further comment on Miss Deborah’s headwear, stating;

> I no sooner saw the bonnet than I was reminded of a helmet; and in that hybrid bonnet, half-helmet, half-jockey-cap, did Miss Jenkyns attend Captain Brown’s funeral, and, I believe, supported Miss Jessie with a tender, indulgent firmness which was invaluable, allowing her to weep her passionate fill before they left.’ (*Cranford*, p.41)

This ‘hybrid’ bonnet further suggests the dual masculine and feminine nature of Miss Deborah, and further adds to her ambiguity. However, the fact that the bonnet is ‘half-helmet’ and ‘half-jockey-cap’ which arguably are both fairly masculine objects highlights the strength of her feminine identity, considering that at its core, it is still a bonnet. In this way, it could be argued that the bonnet is used by Gaskell to further highlight and reinforce Miss Jenkyns’ strong character. This is further highlighted by her ‘tender, indulgent firmness’, another example of the masculine and feminine duality of her character. The ‘half-helmet’ aspect of the bonnet has connotations of protection and security, and could further highlight the fact that the bonnet, for women, serves as a means of shielding and protecting themselves both literally and metaphorically. In *North and South*, this metaphorical shielding and protecting is

20 Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution’, p.900

demonstrated through Margaret Hale's dream which occurs after she refuses Mr Lennox's proposal of marriage;

> Mr Lennox – his visit, his proposal – the remembrance of which had been so rudely pushed aside by the subsequent events of the day – haunted her dreams that night. He was climbing up some tree of fabulous height to reach the branch whereon was slung her bonnet, he was falling, and she was struggling to save him, but held back by some invisible powerful hand. He was dead. (*North and South*, p.40)

Mr Lennox's attempt to acquire Margaret's bonnet is a clear metaphor for his attempt to acquire Margaret herself, which further reinforces the assertion that Margaret's bonnet is an extension of her character, in a similar fashion to other women in Gaskell's novels. The fact that he is climbing a 'tree of fabulous height' suggests that the bonnet (and by extension Margaret) is unobtainable, a suggestion which is further highlighted by his subsequent death. The bonnet also serves as a means of protecting Margaret's virtue and her virginity, further reinforcing the notion that for some female characters, headwear serves as a shield and protects them. The fact that she is described as 'struggling to save him' is a suggestion of Margaret's internal struggle over whether or not she made the correct decision to accept his proposal or not. The 'invisible powerful hand', however, suggests that her subconscious is telling her she made the right decision.

In the works of Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell, it is clear to see that headwear features significantly and acts as a narrative tool. However, there is a difference between the two authors in the way they make use of headwear – Gaskell uses hats and bonnets to indicate inner aspects of her female characters more so than Brontë, who concerns herself with both sexes and takes a more subtle approach when using headwear for character development. Brontë, when writing women, suggests that preconceptions of certain types of headwear are not necessarily accurate, whereas Gaskell appears to place a greater importance on these

preconceptions and the impressions they generate in order to add additional dimensions to her characters.

Chapter Two

‘They would not sell their caps and ribbons to anyone without pedigree.’ (*Cranford,* p. 81)
Headwear and its relevance to issues of social class

Social class was an aspect of Victorian society which needed to be clearly defined, and as such it was necessary to be able to quickly determine the social position of others. This typically came in the form of clothing and accessories. Generally, critics have been able to easily and effectively analyse this through the different types of clothing worn by different subsections of society, but studies focusing solely on the social ramifications of different types of hats and headwear are extremely rare. While there appears to be evidence of class indicators in the headwear worn by every social class, for reasons of space this chapter primarily focuses on the headwear of working people and servants, as these are the two sections of society most frequently referenced by Gaskell and Brontë upon a preliminary reading of their works.

In the nineteenth century, upper and middle class families often employed working class women to work in a number of roles within their household. Their responsibilities included a great number of things, but one of the most important was maintaining their own personal appearance. How they presented themselves was often a reflection on the family that they worked for – an ill-kept appearance signified an ill-kept household. For instance, wearing a cap was essential and it had to be absolutely immaculate: in Christine Terhune Herrick’s help book, *The Expert Maid-Servant*, she writes ‘the cap is no mark of servitude, and has a reason for its existence in the added neatness and freshness it imparts to the working-girl's garb.’[21] However, Ariel Beaujot states that ‘[w]omen were acutely aware that their class was not automatically evident, but that it had to be constantly maintained,

21 Christine Terhune Herrick, *The Expert Maid-Servant*, Project Gutenberg (http://www.gutenberg.org/files/43042/43042-h/43042-h.htm#page_019), para.90.

demonstrated, and proven by adjusting their outer appearance.'[22] Whilst the servant is expected to be immaculately dressed in the clothing appropriate to their position (cap included), their clothing is in place to reinforce the existing class system to both servant and mistress, as well as those around them. It is clear that Brontë recognises the cultural significance of the servant's clothing, and in particular the servant's cap. She utilises the cap in different ways within her novels. In *The Professor,* Minnie (the servant) is described as 'having departed [the house] in clean cap and smart shawl'.[23] The 'clean cap and smart shawl' are the epitome of the 'neatness and freshness' expected of the Victorian servant (see Appendix One for an example of an appropriately dressed maid from 1900). As she is also described as leaving the house 'clean' and 'smart', this reflects well on the household itself, which shows that Brontë knows how an ideal servant should act and what they should wear. In *Shirley*, however, the maid Sarah is portrayed as being a nuisance to her mistress, Hortense Moore. When talking about Sarah:

> Mademoiselle admitted the truth of this conjecture: according to her, 'ces paysannes Anglaises étaient tout insupportables.' What would she not give for some 'bonne cuisinièére Anversoise,' with the high cap, short petticoat, and decent sabots proper to her class – something better, indeed, than an insolent coquette in a flounced gown, and absolutely without cap! (For Sarah, it appears, did not partake the opinion of St. Paul that "it is a shame for a woman to go with her head uncovered;" but, holding rather a contrary doctrine, resolutely refused to imprison in linen or muslin the plentiful tresses of her yellow hair, which it was her wont to fasten up smartly with a comb behind, and on Sundays to wear curled in front.) [24]

The fact that Sarah refuses to wear a cap will have jarred with the readers of the time, and especially with the character of Hortense. It is unclear, however, as to whether the narrator shares her opinion, as the exclamation mark in 'absolutely without cap!' would suggest that Brontë is deliberately framing Hortense's concerns as hyperbolic. '"Bonne cuisiniere

22 Beaujot, *Victorian Fashion Accessories*, p.10
23 Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2010), p.184. All further references will be given in the body of the text.
24 Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley* (London: Penguin Group, 2012), p.87. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

anversoise" refers to the maids from Hortense's own country, Belgium, and her following statement implies that they have an obedience which the English maid appears to lack, as is evidenced by her refusal to wear the cap. Interestingly, the term 'paysannes Anglais' (English peasants) implies that English maids, in the mind of Hortense at least, are on the level of paupers and not even worth acknowledging as professionals. The word 'imprison' suggests that Herrick's previous statement that caps are not indicative of 'servitude' may be incorrect, and as her book is written for the mistress of the house it would appear that Herrick is concealing the harsh reality that in certain circumstances their servants could be enslaved. It could be that Herrick is aware that the mistresses may feel guilty about enforcing a dress code on their servants, yet she could also be offering the mistresses an excuse or justification for their actions if their servants happen to object in a similar fashion to Sarah. It is also important to note the satirical tone of Brontë's description, in the respect that she is not directly suggesting that Sarah is a slave, but rather pointing out her freedom as Hortense fails to control her. Furthermore, the fabrics 'linen' and 'muslin' juxtapose the word 'imprison' as they are light materials not commonly thought of as being synonymous with imprisonment. This suggests that Brontë could in fact be in agreement with Herrick and is using the light fabrics as a means of ridiculing Sarah's behaviour. Brontë could be using the imprisonment of the hair within the cap as a metaphor for the maid's position in society. The mistress of the house wants Sarah to wear a cap so Sarah's social position is, in a sense, 'locked' in place. This is further reiterated by the words 'proper to her class' as they suggests Hortense is 'acutely aware' that 'class' is 'not automatically evident', and wishes it to be physically enforced upon Sarah. The fact that Sarah does not wear her cap leaves Hortense in some doubt as to the social hierarchy within the household.

This anxiety about social hierarchy appears to be a common predicament within Victorian society around this time, as many periodicals addressed this difficulty through both

articles and illustrations. In 'My Mistress's Bonnet' (see Appendix Two), published in 1847 - two years before the publication of *Shirley* – a maid is depicted wearing her mistress's bonnet while standing in what is implied to be her mistress's bedroom. The drawing is interesting due to the fact that until the viewer sees her waist, and sees the apron and sweeping brush (the only indicators of her class) she could be easily mistaken for a lady. The fact that the drawing is named 'My Mistress's Bonnet' immediately draws the viewer's attention to the bonnet itself – a lavish affair trimmed with feathers which immediately infers wealth, which then by extension assigns the wealth to the maid. According to Lawrence Langner, 'one of the primary purposes of clothes through the ages was to demonstrate the wearer's superiority, [and] […] one of man's first innovations was to use clothes to assist him in dominating others.'[25] This suggests that items of clothing such as the bonnet assists the mistress of the house 'in dominating others' and helps her portray 'superiority' to those around her – it does the same as the maid's cap but in the opposite way. By wearing the bonnet, the maid is taking away her mistress's domination and 'superiority' and assimilating it as her own. The fact that this assimilation takes place in her mistress's bedroom (her inner sanctum and private space) is extremely relevant as it suggests that the maid is attempting to erode her mistress' social position from 'within', and one of the most visually striking means by which to do so is through the use of a bonnet, further highlighting the cultural and social significance of nineteenth century headwear. There is evidence to suggest, however, that the maid's efforts are not entirely successful. The title of the illustration is still 'My Mistress's Bonnet', highlighting the power of the mistress even in her absence, and the maid has clearly paused in the middle of her everyday work to secretly wear the bonnet, before presumably putting it back and continuing with her work. In the action of returning the hat, she is returning the social order to the status quo. The illustration has clear connotations of the Carnivalesque,

25 Lawrence Langner, 'Clothes and Government', in Mary Ellen Roach and Joanne Bubolz Eicker (eds.), *Dress, Adornment, and the Social Order* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965), pp.124-127 (p.124).

described by Bakhtin as 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order.'[26] The maid's apron and broom indicate that this subversion of authority can only be temporary, and would therefore suggest that the maid's social impact is in fact quite limited. It would appear that the purpose of the illustration, though it could infer several things, is to humorously suggest that there is a possibility that maids were actually doing this. The origin of the illustration, *Sharpe's London Magazine*, markets itself as being of 'entertainment and instruction for general reading'. This suggests that the illustration is not intended to warn the wealthy women who would presumably be horrified at the idea of maids wearing their clothing, but rather for the middle and lower classes who are more likely to read the magazine. If it is truly meant for general readers, this suggests that it will have been available to maids and servants, offering a comic depiction of their work, as well as showing just how easy it would be for a maid to temporarily improve their social station. Equally, however, it could be intended to highlight the class tensions between the middle classes and their servants. Ariel Beaujot further states that:

> Class boundaries were not as firm as etiquette manuals and popular songs would have us believe. Working-class maids […] were warned that they must "dress their station" and were sometimes fired for their cross-dressing. The […] lady's concern surrounding the appearance of her social inferiors reveals that, at some level, she understood that class was a performance and the boundaries of class were permeable.[27] P48

Beaujot is stating that the class boundaries between the maid and the mistress are extremely fluid, as evidenced by the use of the word 'permeable'. Hortense is evidently a lady who has 'concern[s] surrounding the appearance of her social inferiors', such as Sarah. As such, Hortense's disapproval stems not from the appearance that Sarah is presenting to the world but rather the fact that it appears that Sarah does not know her place in society, either as a maid or as a respectable woman, as is evidenced by the use of the word 'coquette' to describe

26 Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Rabelais and His World', from *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, pp. 686-692 (p. 686)
27 Beaujot, *Victorian Fashion Accessories*, p.48

her. Hortense and her brother Robert are themselves in a rather precarious social position in England, even though while they lived in Belgium it was stable. Hortense has very little ‘superiority’ over people around her in English society, except the working-class, represented in this instance by Sarah. By attempting to force the cap on Sarah, Hortense is trying to reaffirm Sarah’s inferiority and in doing so reinforce her own position in society and the household. This indicates that Hortense’s anger is a sign of her insecurity, further reinforcing the suggestion the mistress feared the growing influence of the maid. To Hortense and other upper class women, the cap serves as a key symbol of subservience. Yet the maid pictured in 'My Mistress’s Bonnet' acts as a hybrid between mistress and maid, adopting the mistresses’ headwear while holding on to her maid’s brush, which suggests that the maid is still acutely aware of her social position even without her cap. However, it is interesting to note that Victorian mistresses attempted to control not only the maid’s cap but also the maid’s own personal headwear, as evidenced by the following article.

In an article named 'Mistress and Maid' from 1857, the author examines the tempestuous relationship between the Mistress and the Maid, and comments that ‘[i]t is good and pleasant to see the right relation existing between these two members of the social family. Why is the sight so unfrequent? To which side belongs most blame?’[28] This statement implies that the author thinks that this is a very common problem in Victorian society, and needs to be remedied. The words ‘right relation’ suggest that socially the mistress has let her control slip and relations between the two have become more ‘balanced’, and he ‘right’ balance needs to be restored. However, it is interesting to note that the author of the article does not make clear what they believe the ‘right relation’ to be, which suggests that the intended audience are presumed to know this for themselves. The author goes on further to highlight the minor issues that the maid causes for the mistress, one of these being that an imagined maid ‘goes on

28 Anon, ‘Mistress and Maid’, *National Magazine*, 1857

Sunday with flowers in her bonnet'.[29] This infers that flowers in a maid's bonnet are inappropriate, and probably considered too extravagant for someone of her station – which is confirmed by another article[30] applauding a working-class girl for having a simple ribbon trim on her bonnet. The bonnet is also battered and broken but has been well looked after. The author of 'Mistress and Maid' attempts to give words of advice to the mistress – helping her to understand the right way of responding to Sarah's 'feminine foible of vanity'.[31] The author states that the Mistress must:

> Show her that it is not *you* she injures by such vanities, but her own self-respect and respectability. You are not angry with her; but you are sorry for her. Personally she does you no harm; but relatively, as your servant, and one of your family, it vexes you to see her making this one step in a wrong direction.[32]

The most immediately noticeable aspect of this quotation is the continual reiteration of 'you' and 'your', which suggests that the mistress should be obligated to control the situation, and acts as an affirmation that the maid belongs to the mistress's family, and is therefore their (the mistress's) responsibility. It also further reiterates the previous point that an ill-kept appearance signifies an ill-kept household, but equally that an extravagant maid's bonnet is indicative of a lack of control within the household, as it suggests that the servants of the house do not adequately recognise their social position and therefore see it as acceptable to wear bonnets which could show the mistress that they have the potential to subvert the weak social structure of the household. The use of the word 'vanities' is interesting, as it suggests a further moral weakness to the maid's character; namely, that she is more concerned with her looks than her work, falling prey to feminine vanity. In this way, not only could it be suggested that the maid does the mistress harm by wearing a bonnet with inappropriate

29 Ibid
30Anon, 'The Honour of Honesty', 1849
31Anon, 'Mistress and Maid', 1857
32 Ibid

trimmings (by potentially neglecting her work), but also that by demanding that the maids remove their trimmings the mistress is able to control both the maid's working caps and personal bonnets, and by extension seek to control every aspect of the maid's life. It is interesting to note that 'Mistress and Maid' does not offer any advice to maids on how behave appropriately, opting instead to focus entirely on the role of the mistress. This is not to say that the article is sympathetic to maids, however; simply that mistresses are more intelligent than their servants and therefore have a greater responsibility as to how their servants behave. This, then, indicates that *The National Magazine* is not a magazine aimed at the serving classes, as *Sharpe's London Magazine* appears to be. There is also evidence in *Wives and Daughters* that potential employers even started to attempt to control the maid's life from the beginning, training them from an early age to behave, but also to dress, in an appropriate manner.

Rather than focusing primarily on older servants in the style of Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell references a school in *Wives and Daughters* where 'girls are taught […] to be capital housemaids […] and, above all, to dress neatly in a kind of charity uniform devised by the ladies of Cumnor Towers; - white caps, white tippets, check aprons, blue gowns, and ready curtseys.' (*Wives and Daughters*, p.5) The use of the words 'above all' is particularly revealing as they further reinforce Herrick's argument that a servant's dress was even more important than their work in certain situations. The fact that it is the 'ladies of Cumnor Towers' who have designed the uniform suggests that the ladies (who will in all likelihood be potential employers) are conditioning the girls into appropriate manners and dress from an early age. Returning to the idea of caps as symbols of subservience which keep the servants in their 'rightful' place, the fact that the ladies provide the girls with the means of their own servitude is particularly cunning, as by extension these girls are not even in employment but already under the ladies' control. Mary Allen Roach argues that '[m]aterial objects can carry

messages as cogently as verbal sounds, serving as symbols of the social setting which are susceptible to manipulation. Thus, dress and adornment become tangible means of gaining some control over the social situation.'[33] This highlights the fact that caps provide the ladies of Cumnor Towers with a 'means of gaining some control' over the young girls. However, in several nineteenth-century novels it is not the wearing of the headwear that is significant but rather the way the headwear is treated. In some instances headwear is destroyed, which can reveal just as much about the nature of headwear as a character wearing it.

The controlling and destroying of the maid's headwear can be seen in *Villette*, specifically in the character of Désirée, potentially the future mistress of the school. Lucy observes that Désirée 'would steal to [the servants] attics, open their drawers and boxes, wantonly tear their best caps and soil their best shawls' (*Villette,* p.83). From the outset it is understood that this is unusually intrusive behaviour, as highlighted by the words 'steal' and 'open', and suggests that Désirée is invading the servants' privacy. This is interesting, as it suggests that Brontë is acknowledging the maid's right to personal privacy over their own belongings, and particularly their garments. The use of the word 'wantonly' indicates that this is simply destruction for destruction's sake. However, as a future mistress, it will eventually fall on Désirée to take responsibility for the appearance of her servants, however as the book is set during her childhood, it appears that she is literally taking the matter into her own hands, physically preventing the maids from potentially outshining her or her family socially. Désirée's actions are a very extreme version of her mother's, who regularly invades her servants' privacy and abuses her role as mistress. Taking Désirée's age into account, it could be suggested that she is physically destroying the servants' headwear rather than simply asking them to comply with her rules because her authority is limited in comparison with characters such as Hortense in *Shirley.* In emphasising that it is the servants' 'best caps', that

33 Mary Ellen Roach and Joanne Bubolz Eicher, *Dress, Adornment and the Social Order* ((New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965), p.187

are destroyed, Brontë is also implying that these caps are not for work but for personal adornment, making their destruction all the more poignant. According to Simon Gatrell, '[c]lothes are the interface between ourselves and the rest of the world.'[34] Désirée affects the way in which the world perceives the servants, and by extension the family through the 'interface' of the cap. By tearing the caps, Désirée is preventing social advancement on the part of the servant, for a time at least. If Désirée has in fact destroyed the servants' work caps (it is ambiguous as to whether or not 'best caps' is referring solely to personal effects) this puts the servants in a similar position to that of Sarah in *Shirley*, as tearing their work caps would force them to work capless. This puts them in a less clearly-defined social position, something which, as has been evidenced, was to be avoided at all costs within polite society. However, it is interesting to note that in *Cranford*, rather than focusing on ladies' maids while they are in service, Gaskell chooses to focus on them after they have finished service. This further complicates the servants' relationship with those to be considered upper class and society in general.

The Barker sisters in *Cranford* exist in a unique position in society, in which they own a shop following a successful career as ladies' maids. Gaskell writes that they;

> had pretty good situations as ladies' maids, and had saved money enough to set up a milliner's shop, which had been patronised by the lady in the neighbourhood. Lady Arley, for instance, would occasionally give Miss Barkers the pattern of an old cap of hers, which they immediately copied and circulated among the *elite* of Cranford. I say the *elite*, for Miss Barkers had caught the trick of the place, and piqued themselves upon their 'aristocratic connection'. They would not sell their caps and ribbons to anyone without pedigree. Many a farmer's wife or daughter turned away huffed from Miss Barkers' select millinery (*Cranford*, p.81)

The fact the Barker sisters used to be ladies' maids, and have worked their way into a respectable position in society, clearly shows that maids had the potential to alter their position in society, which gives further reason as to why upper class women would feel the

34 Gatrell, *Thomas Hardy: Writing Dress*, p.3

need to constantly remind them of their place through the usage of maid's caps. This is not to say that the Barker sisters have reached a position in society higher than the ladies, however – merely that they have demonstrated their capability of advancement, and in doing so confirming the threat they could potentially pose. The fact that Lady Arley occasionally gives the sisters a 'pattern of an old cap of hers' is also interesting, as it suggests that whilst this appears to be an act of kindness, it could also be interpreted as an attempt to maintain control, in the sense that it lets Lady Arley believe that they can only continue running their shop with the old patterns she deigns to give them. The fact that it is an old pattern further indicates that Lady Arley is attempting to ensure that the sisters are not selling the style of hats she is currently wearing. However, what makes this quotation all the more insightful is the sisters' attitude towards their clientele; they are using Lady Arley in a similar fashion to the way in which she attempts to use them. The fact that the farmers' daughters are turned away is particularly noteworthy as it could be argued that both the sisters and the daughters are of a similar social background. The use of the word 'pedigree' is extremely ironic, as neither the customers nor the sellers are from social backgrounds one would consider to be of a high pedigree. The sisters' association with the upper classes (i.e. serving them for a long period of time) has affected their perceptions of their place in society, leading them to look down upon those who are ostensibly on their level. Ariel Beaujot states that 'accessories unconsciously reflect the ideals of the individuals who manufactured and consumed them,'[35] which implies that the Barker sisters have been influenced by the ideals of the women who buy their hats i.e. women who would not want their fashionable caps to be worn by people of a lower standing than themselves. However, the hats the sisters manufacture do in fact reflect their own ideals, and by extension the notion that the manufacturer and consumer are one and the same.

35 Beaujot, *Victorian Fashion Accessories*, p.8

Interestingly, when one of the Barker sisters dies and the shop is closed, the other sister (Miss Betty) is described as dressing;

> finer than any lady in Cranford; and we did not wonder at it; for it was understood that she was wearing out all the bonnet and caps and outrageous ribbons which had once formed her stock-in-trade. It was five or six years since she had given up shop, so in any other place than Cranford her dress might have been considered *passée*. (*Cranford*, p.82)

That she is dressed finer 'than any lady in Cranford' is relevant, as it places her above the women socially. However it is important to point out that it is implied that by being finely dressed, the author is referring solely to her headwear rather than any other item of clothing. This further emphasises the importance of headwear to the women of Cranford, and by extension the rest of the country. However, it is ironic that the items she is wearing were at one point meant for other women of a higher class than she was at the time she was selling them, so in matter of fact this action could be interpreted as quite subversive. This, by extension, can be interpreted as threatening to women with a similar social status to Lady Arley – the former ladies' maid is dressing better than she should be. It is interesting to note that, as Ariel Beaujot stated previously, the manufacturer of the hats has become the consumer, and as such reflects the ideals of the ladies she originally created the hats for. However, the fact that they are 'five or six years' out of fashion indicates that inside the social bubble of Cranford, isolated from the rest of the world, wearing headwear which is out of fashion is not a major concern as long as it looks attractive or impressive. Outside of Cranford, Miss Barker's actions would not necessarily be seen as subversive and threatening due to the constantly evolving nature of fashion. Miss Barker's headwear appears to further indicate that the social position of the ladies' maid was maintained and reinforced primarily through the use of the maid's cap – when she is not bound to this cap, she is able to create a much more respectable identity for herself, to such an extent that the other ladies she associates with never bring up the fact that the finest dressed lady in Cranford is a former

maid. The only time the Barker sisters are truly defined in a clear societal role is when they are ladies' maids, and they are made to wear the maid's cap. However, it is also imperative to point out that while the role of the maid is generally clearly defined by the maid's cap, there are situations in other novels where a character's role is ambiguous primarily because of their headwear.

This ambiguity is generally applied to the position of that of a governess or a school teacher. In *Jane Eyre*, Mr Rochester, upon first meeting Jane, states:

> You are not a servant at the Hall, of course. You are –' He stopped, ran his eye over my dress, which, as usual, was quite simple – a black merino cloak, a black beaver bonnet; neither of them half fine enough for a lady's-maid. He seemed puzzled to decide what I was – I helped him. (*Jane Eyre*, p.135)

The words 'You are not a servant' immediately imply that while Jane's social position, or at least her means of work, are ambiguous to Mr Rochester, her clothing suggests that she appears socially above that of a general servant. However, the fact that her 'cloak' and 'black beaver bonnet' are not 'half fine' enough for 'a lady's-maid' suggests that her social position falls between the two. In this moment, the 'bonnet' appears to reflect Jane's status as it is equally ambiguous to Mr Rochester, as well as reflective of the governess's position within the household and society in general. It is also important to point out that as master of the house, it is likely that Mr Rochester will know all his servants, thereby making it easy for him identify Jane as something other. According to Ferdynand Zweig, '[s]ocial factors […] find expression in clothes'[36], which, when applied to Jane Eyre's clothing, and in particular her bonnet, is extremely relevant. Jane says nothing to Mr Rochester initially, but her bonnet wordlessly expresses the social factors of Jane's situation, which reaffirms Mary Allen Roach's previous statement that '[m]aterial objects can carry messages as cogently as verbal sounds'. This allows Mr Rochester to immediately understand something of her social

36 Zweig, 'Clothing Standards and Habits', p.111

position, in as much as he realises she is not a servant. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that Brontë appears to select items of headwear for Jane which all have this ambiguous quality. One such example of this is the cottage bonnet which, according to Georgine de Courtais, 'was to become the universal fashion during the next decade [1840s]. This was a style which particularly appealed to the Englishwoman and was popular amongst all classes.'[37] The fact that it is 'popular amongst all classes' further highlights that it is also a bonnet which transcends social boundaries, and it allows Jane more social ambiguity. The cottage bonnet itself was also available in many different fabrics, but in the following quotation Charlotte Brontë omits the fabric which Jane's bonnet is made of. When visiting her cousins, they are described as giving Jane Eyre 'sundry side-glances that measured [her] from head to foot – now traversing the folds of [her] drab merino pelisse, and now lingering on the lain trimming of [her] cottage bonnet.' (*Jane Eyre*, p.273) Here, the omission of the bonnet's fabric further adds to the ambiguity of Jane's social class, as she is not assigned a fabric which is easily associated with a corresponding social class. This omission is relevant because in *Villette* Brontë points out that Sarah's caps are made of linen and muslin, which we must assume are fabrics associated with servants and maids, provided for them by their employers. This would appear to suggest that fabrics are relevant to Brontë and her writings, in the respect that they highlight social class, and as such it is clear to see that an omission of the fabric of a bonnet carries clear authorial intent. The fact that her cousins (who were once wealthy) do not linger on the bonnet itself suggests that it is a bonnet which is suitable for her position, and yet at the same time suitable for theirs. As it does not immediately infer to people they know that she is a governess, this works in their favour as it does not bring them down socially by association. However, the 'lingering on the lain trimming' suggests that this

37 Georgine de Courtais, *Women's Headdress and Hairstyles in England from AD600 to the present day* (London: B T Batsford Ltd, 1973), p.108

is Jane's social downfall, insomuch as it reveals her position and social class; as women often did the trimmings themselves it suggests that Jane's is slightly shoddy and perhaps betrays her lack of knowledge of adornment.

In a similar vein to a cottage bonnet, in the sense that both are items of headwear which transcend boundaries of class, the straw bonnet, a key piece of headwear in both the works of Brontë and Gaskell, is an extremely useful object with which to analyse aspects of class in nineteenth century society. In the time period that Brontë and Gaskell were both writing, between the years 1845-65, the production of straw bonnets was at its peak. According to Georgine de Courtais;

> The straw bonnet, formerly worn only by ladies of fashion, was now within the reach of all classes due to the expansion of the English straw plaiting and hat manufacturing industry which reached its peak of production in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.[38]

What is vitally important in this quotation is the fact that the straw bonnet was 'formerly worn only by ladies of fashion', which, when applied to the use of the straw bonnets in the works of Brontë and Gaskell, is particularly relevant. The fact that it is very rare that one of the wealthy women in their novels wears a straw bonnet suggests that whilst the straw bonnet might have been available to all classes it was precisely this sudden availability which made it distasteful to the upper orders. This stems from a 'fear of appearing to be of the working class' or at least a lower social class than they were, as '[t]hroughout the nineteenth century there was a conflation of race and class fears.'[39] However, the words 'now within the reach of all classes' is something that is particularly significant, as both Gaskell and Brontë appear more interested in the way in which the lower to middle classes interact and use the straw bonnet. For Brontë at least, the straw bonnet is utilised as a means of equalising social boundaries for certain characters and various aspects of society. When Jane wears the cottage bonnet it lends her an

38 Courtais, *Women's Headdress and Hairstyles*, p.113
39 Beaujot, *Victorian Fashion Accessories*, p.10

air of ambiguity; the straw bonnet appears to work in a similar way, blurring the previously clearly-defined lines between the social classes, and arguably giving its wearers a sense of equality. This sense of equality or at least deeming away with social class is apparent in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* as the schoolgirls are described in going out for the day in a

> clean fresh print dress, and [a] light straw bonnet, each made and trimmed as the French workwoman alone can make and trim, so as to unite the utterly unpretending with the perfectly becoming, was the rule of costume. Nobody flaunted in faded silk; nobody wore a second-hand best article. (*Villette*, p.353)

The fact that these girls, who are all from different social backgrounds, are attired in the exact same manner is particularly relevant as it infers that there is a uniformity amongst them, and that the mistress of the school is at least aware that whilst they go out in a group there must no outward signs of inferiority amongst them. This also works in the mistress's favour as the equality of the bonnets could be reflective to the public that girls are treated fairly regardless of their social situation – implying that within her school there is no social hierarchy. However, it is also worth mentioning, similarly, to the previous points surrounding the maid's cap that a poorly dressed child indicated a poorly run school which is further reaffirmed by Ariel Beaujot's statement that '[i]n Victorian culture, a well-kept appearance indicated respectability.'[40] Here, the girls are assigned respectability which by extension assigns this to the mistress of the school. The words 'each made and trimmed as the French workwoman alone can make and trim' suggest that the bonnet is very well made and of a high standard. It also demonstrates that there could be a perceived contrast in the quality of the bonnets. The suggestion that French bonnets are particularly well made indicates that there are bonnets from other countries which are not to the same standard, which further indicates the existence of a social hierarchy solely through the appearance of one's hat. It also interesting to note that this example is not the only one of its kind as in *Jane Eyre*, the schoolgirls are ordered '"To

40 Beaujot, *Victorian Fashion Accessories*, p.139

the garden!" [and] Each put on a coarse straw bonnet, with strings of coloured calico, and a cloak of gray frieze. I was similarly equipped, and, following the stream, I made my way into the open air.' (*Jane Eyre*, p.51) There is clearly a hierarchal difference between the two quotations, as the latter quotation refers to a lower class of children than the children in *Villette*. This is highlighted through the word 'coarse' as it implies that the straw bonnet is made of a rough material, whereas in *Villette* the quality of the straw is omitted, and yet there is sense that the children are better looked after. It is important to point out that Jane is dressed in similar attire to the children which further reinforces the idea that her social ambiguity is reflected through her clothing, specifically her headwear. By wearing the same clothing as the children there is nothing to suggest that she is in fact in a position of authority when in fact she is a teacher at this point in the novel. This, it could be suggested, is indicative of Brontë's desire to illustrate the fact that a simple piece of headwear has enough cultural influence to totally deconstruct the fundamental ideas of authority, and alter society's perceptions of any character.

It could be suggested that Mr Rochester attempts to alter society's perception of Jane once they become romantically involved. He attempts to supply her with material objects of a high value. Jane describes a shopping trip;

> With anxiety I watched his eye rove over the gay stores: he fixed on a rich silk of the most brilliant amethyst dye, and a superb pink satin. I told him in a new series of whispers, that he might as well buy me a gold gown and a silver bonnet at once; I should certainly never venture to wear his choice. (*Jane Eyre*, p.321)

By fixing his eyes on rich silks and satins Mr Rochester is trying to replace the fabrics that had previously been associated with Jane, which as previously stated, Brontë omits to mention. In this way, it is made abundantly clear which social class Jane must associate herself with if she wishes to be viewed favourably as Mr Rochester's partner. The fact that Jane sarcastically suggests that he buy her 'a gold gown and a silver bonnet' indicates that the

possibility of wearing these, in Jane's mind, is equally as ludicrous as wearing Mr Rochester's silks. In this moment, Mr Rochester is replacing Jane's identity with that of Mrs Rochester (that is to say, Jane as Mr Rochester's wife as opposed to Bertha), so by extension she loses her own identity and becomes an extension of Mr Rochester's. This is further highlighted by Jane's comment that 'It was enough that in yonder closet, opposite my dressing-table, garments said to be [Mrs Rochester's] had already displaced my black […] Lowood frock and straw bonnet' (*Jane Eyre*, p.330). This displacement serves as further evidence that Mr Rochester is attempting to remove all traces of Jane's former identity in order to alter society's perception of her. The fact that she refers to her old 'Lowood frock and straw bonnet' as her own suggests that this is an identity she firmly associates herself with. The frock and straw bonnet which gave her social ambiguity is taken from her and a clearly defined identity is thrust upon her. This identity (and her future social class) is further threatened by the destruction of her wedding veil by Bertha whom in the dead of night tears the expensive veil (a wedding gift from Mr Rochester to Jane) into pieces. In a similar fashion to Désirée in *Villette*, Bertha uses her elevated position (she is, after all, the true mistress of the house) to prevent Jane from using headwear to place herself on an equal level. The veil symbolises the beginning of her life as Mrs Rochester, and by destroying it Bertha is attempting to prevent this from happening. Ariel Beaujot suggests that 'women […] adorned their bodies in beautiful, expensive-looking clothing and accessories, which acted as a symbol of their status and that of their family.'[41] The veil serves as a symbol of the Rochester family and the status that it entails, which will be assigned to Jane by its adornment, and Bertha, by destroying the veil and all it represents is essentially attempting to ultimately destroy Mr Rochester and his family name. However, it is also indicative of Bertha reminding Jane of her

41 Beaujot, *Victorian Fashion Accessories*, p.5

position in society, and as such this further highlights the significance of headwear in the determination of one's social class in the mid nineteenth century.

It is clear to see that Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell were both concerned with examining the position of the working class through their headwear. However, it appears that Brontë, more so than Gaskell, is concerned with the aspect of social class and its relevance to headwear. Headwear, for the working classes at least, was clearly meant to represent their social class and served as a reminder to both society and themselves of their position. Brontë clearly uses her own life experience as a governess as a means of examining and sympathising with the role of the servant. Gaskell, on the other hand, does not necessarily explore the roles of the governess or the maid to the same extent as Brontë, but concerns herself more with industrial workers rather than domestic ones. Both authors, however, demonstrate a clear understanding interest in the way in which social class is portrayed by headwear, and as such make it an important factor in their writing, particularly Brontë.

Conclusion

From the outset of this dissertation it was extremely difficult to decide which authors to focus on due to prominence of hats in the works of so many authors of the time. After careful consideration, Brontë and Gaskell were chosen, partly because of their relationship with one another, and also due to the fact that the time their books were written was a boom period for the production of hats in England, particularly in the industrial North. Initially it was assumed that they would have similar views on the significance of headwear, due to their relationship and the fact that they were writing at the same time in broadly the same region of the country, but it became apparent through closer reading of their respective works that while they both considered headwear significant and important, it was for different reasons. This comes as a result of their different backgrounds and their situation in life.

Charlotte Brontë's time spent working as a governess and teacher, both at home and abroad, has a clear impact on the way she interprets the importance of headwear. She clearly uses headwear as a means of understanding one's position in society and analysing the effect it has on the characters and the way they are perceived. Jane Eyre is perhaps the most significant example when trying to understand Brontë and the relevance of hats to her own life. The fact that Brontë was a governess certainly becomes apparent in the descriptions of Jane's headwear as Brontë understands the role of the governess and its ambiguous nature. This is highlighted by her omission of certain fabrics which would have given Jane a clearly defined social position. Brontë herself sympathises with Jane and feels that the awkwardness of Jane's social position as a governess should not be physically apparent. However, while Brontë's works contain multiple examples of headwear being used to define social class, it is important to explain the lack of examples from Elizabeth Gaskell's works from the chapter which examines this. Through research, the most apparent class to be found in the works of

both authors is the working class, though from different perspectives. Through close reading of Gaskell's work, it becomes clear that she has little interest in governesses and other domestic servants, perhaps due to her social background, but concerns herself instead with the lives of industrial workers, and even then does not feel the need to go into detail about their headwear; her descriptions of hats and headwear appear to primarily focus on adornments and what they say about the individual. As industrial workers had little reason to adorn their hats, it follows that Gaskell spends little time describing their headwear and instead focuses on the realities of their everyday life. Gaskell's views on hats with relation to class come about as a result of her own upbringing; while Brontë's accounts of the lives of working class people come about as a result of her own first-hand experience, Gaskell, who had no need to work for a living especially once she was married, takes her accounts of the working class solely from the role of an observer. It is important to point out that Gaskell appears extremely sympathetic to the struggles of the working class, but the fact that she never had a reason to wear a hat associated with the working class perhaps explains why it is not an especially prominent feature in her depictions of the working class. What is apparent in Brontë's work is fear, on the part of the mistresses, of a possible uprising in the lower classes, highlighted through the abundant usage of maid's caps. This fear is also apparent in articles and publications of the time, which would suggest that Brontë is using headwear as a means of highlighting the struggle between the classes, and analysing the reasons behind it.

Another aspect of Brontë's writing, which becomes apparent with further reading, is the fact that Brontë appears more concerned with issues pertaining to gender than Gaskell, particularly when it comes to an analysis of headwear and its significance. She seems particularly interested in the idea of cross-dressing, and specifically cross-dressing through the use of headwear. More so than Gaskell, her male characters have a tendency to behave in a typically feminine (for the time) fashion towards their headwear, such as M. Paul

Emmanuel's interactions with his bonnet-grec. Occasionally her characters will even go so far as wear headwear associated with women, as in the instance of Mr Rochester and the gipsy's bonnet, which seems to be a device on Brontë's part to reveal hidden and dark depths to her character. It must be acknowledged at this point in the dissertation that there is an instance of male cross-dressing in Gaskell's work, namely Peter Jenkyns putting on his sister's clothing in *Cranford*, enraging his father and ultimately causing him to leave home. Unfortunately there was not sufficient space to fully investigate this instance in the body of the dissertation, as although relevant to the idea of cross-dressing in itself, it was less focused on headwear but instead on clothing in general.

It is interesting to note that neither Brontë nor Gaskell give the same attention to detail that they give their female characters' headwear when it comes to their male characters, except in a select few cases, most notably M. Paul Emmanuel, as previously stated. Upon further research of headwear in the nineteenth century, this is worthy of further analysis, as there is evidence to suggest that men placed just as much importance on the presentation of their headwear as the women in Gaskell and Brontë's works. One such piece of evidence comes again from the article 'Hats Off!', which satirically analyses the importance of the hat with a specific focus on men. The article provides a clear representation of the importance of male headwear, as is evidenced by the quotation 'It might be my own choice to wear a cocked-hat […] but what would my friends say? What would the world say? […]The street-boys would run after me, with shouts; […] the world […] would expel me from within it'.[42] Although clearly exaggerated, this quotation gives a clear impression of the attitudes of Victorian society towards men's hats, which makes it all the more unusual that with two notable exceptions, Gaskell and Brontë choose to avoid detailed descriptions of the hats of their male characters, opting instead to describe the way in which they interact with their

42Anon, 'Hats Off!', 1859

headwear. This could be attributed to the fact that the two authors opted to focus more on the aspects of headwear that they were totally familiar with – in all likelihood they would not have had much exposure to discussing matters of headwear with male contemporaries as they would have done with one another. This discussion of headwear between women is highlighted particularly by the ladies of *Cranford*, as evidenced by the quotation, 'And now, by the expressive way in which she [Miss Pole] cleared her throat, and waited for all minor subjects (such as caps and turbans) to be cleared off the course'(*Cranford*, p.102). No such interactions are described as occurring between male characters, or between mixed groups, so while masculine headwear remained an extremely significant topic, in the works of Brontë and Gaskell it takes a secondary role to the much more prevalent analysis of feminine headwear.

One such way in which Gaskell's descriptions of hats differ from Brontë's is the fact that Gaskell appears to concern herself more with the metaphorical implications of headwear rather than the physical presence and immediate impressions of social class focused on by Brontë. This is not limited to Gaskell's fiction; from reading her letters it seems that she placed great importance on the state of a person's headwear when it came to trusting their judgement. In a letter to her daughter, she writes 'The Tagarts would help you to choose your gowns, but they have frightful bonnets &c - & Emily is the best for all I think.'[43] The fact that they have 'frightful bonnets' leads Gaskell to make the assumption that their judgement on clothing leaves a lot to be desired, and as such does not want their poor taste to be reflected on her daughter, which would by extension suggest that she has the same level of poor judgement and taste. This belief that one's taste in hats is indicative of other aspects of a person's character is a device which is continually used in her fiction, such as Cynthia and her adornments in *Wives and Daughters*. However, there are some novels in which Gaskell uses

43Chapple and Pollard, *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, p.126

this device more than others. For instance, she appears to use this more in *Wives and Daughters* than she does in *Cranford*, which is relevant in itself as in *Wives and Daughters* there is much more secrecy and concealment, which leads to hats being used to provide indicators of characters' personalities, whereas in *Cranford* the ladies are largely honest to one another and there are no secrets. However, Charlotte Brontë also appears to employ this technique in her novels which have a high level of secrecy, such as *Jane Eyre*, and in particular Mr Rochester. Rather than making suggestions about the characters' personalities in the style of Gaskell, Brontë uses it as a means of suggesting that her characters are deceitful while not revealing anything concrete about their personalities. The reason for this is not entirely clear, but it could be suggested that on Brontë's part this is a further reflection of her time spent as a governess, in that she may be wary of stereotyping her characters based on her hats, as she will have likely experienced this judgement as part of her work.

From the research demonstrated in this dissertation, the importance of headwear in understanding Victorian society and its ideals is readily apparent. There are many different themes and authors that the dissertation could have explored, and yet the decision to focus on Brontë and Gaskell was the correct one, as there is enough evidence in these two authors' works alone to justify an investigation, so much information that parts of it had to be omitted for reasons of space. Despite the fact that there are very few critical works focusing on the significance of headwear, a cursory reading of either Brontë or Gaskell's works provides so many examples of headwear being given significant importance that it is difficult to understand why so many critics have neglected this area. This neglect made it clear that this would be a rewarding area to investigate, and would allow for significant independent interpretation. It is my hope that the significance of this field will soon be recognised, and this dissertation will spark further discussion on the subject in order to create a greater understanding of an apparently underappreciated area of Victorian literary study.

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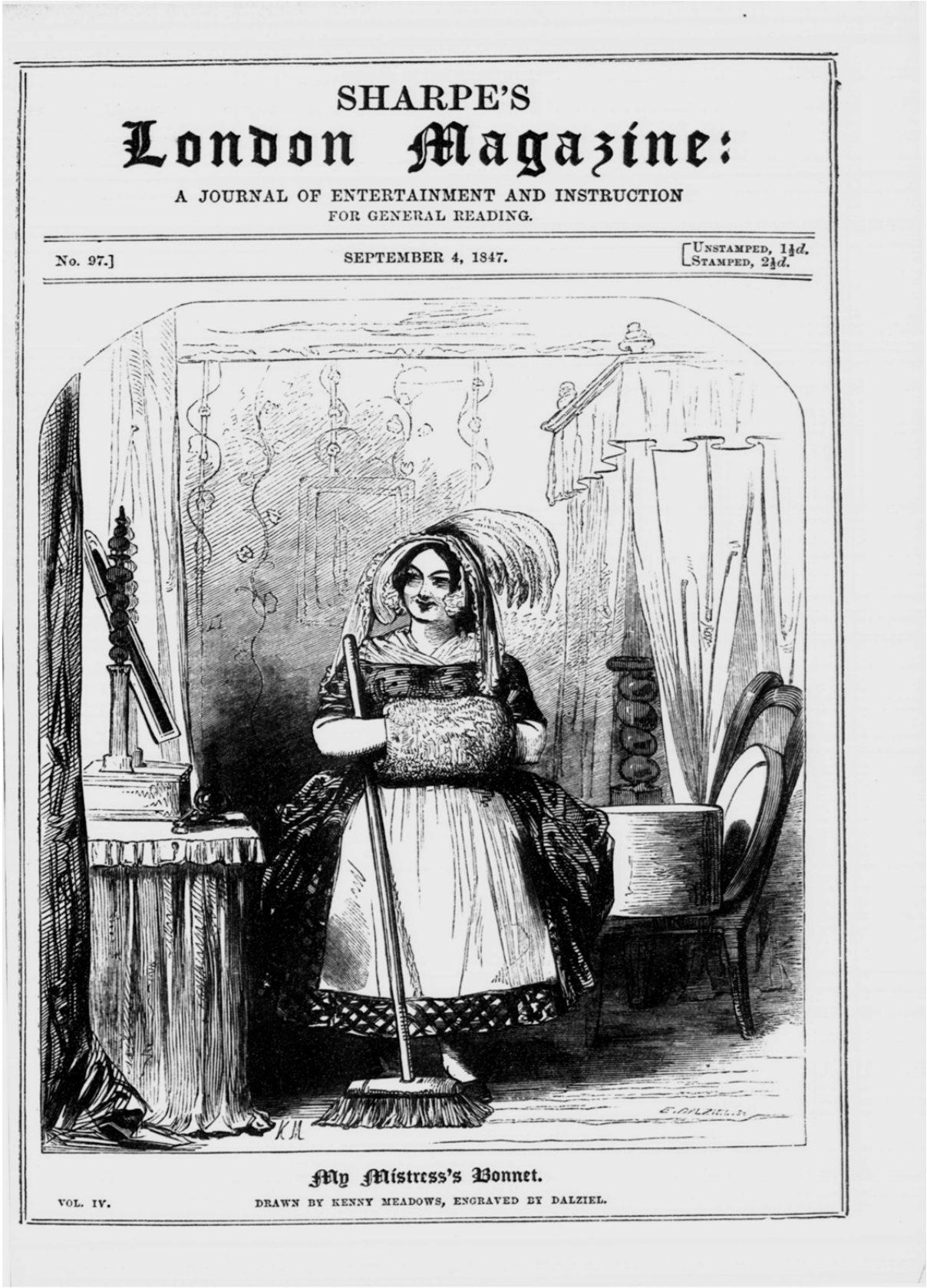
Appendix One

Example of an appropriately attired maid, circa 1900. Taken from BBC article on Victorian servants (Stable URL: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-19544309)

Appendix Two



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